**Harry Truman and Labor Rights**

**Economic and Labor Trouble after World War II**

• Immediately after the war, government controls on the economy ended. Prices rose quickly

while wages stayed the same or dropped.

• Unions avoided strikes during the war. After the war in 1946, 4.5 million workers (the most

in U.S. history) went on strike for higher wages and better conditions.

• Many strikes were successful. New Deal policies supported unions and strengthened them.

**Truman’s Support for Labor and Opposition to Strikes**

• Truman generally supported union rights as defined by Roosevelt’s New Deal.

• Large strikes by workers in major industries (steel, railroads, coal mines) threatened to

paralyze the country.

• Truman used threats of federal government action to avoid or end strikes. Workers would be

drafted as soldiers and ordered to stay on the job. The government would take control

of mines and railroads. Unions gave in to the pressure.

**The Taft-Hartley Act**

• The 1946 elections created a Republican Congress that opposed current labor strength.

• In 1947 the Taft-Hartley Act severely limited union activities and strength. It emphasized the

rights of employees not to join a union.

• Truman vetoed the Taft-Hartley Act, but Congress passed it over his veto.

• Congress rejected Truman’s request to repeal it after the 1948 election.

**The Korean War**

• United States troops became involved in the Korean War in 1950.

• The United States was again in a war effort, but the government did not use total controls

over the economy and industries as in World War II.

**Strikes and National Security**

• Workers continued to strike for higher wages and better conditions.

• Truman tried to end strikes with threats or federal actions. He said strikes threatened national

security and the war effort.

• Truman responded to a scheduled steel strike in 1952 by seizing steel mills.

• The Supreme Court ruled his actions unconstitutional and said he could have used the

Taft-Hartley Act to delay the strike. Truman disliked the act so much he refused to use it.

Result = the strikers got a settlement along the lines they initially wanted. Therefore shows the limits of Federal power.